

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 949

RC 017 671

AUTHOR Kirk, James J.
TITLE HRD Degrees Now Available in Cullowhee.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Graduates; *Graduate Students; Graduate Study; Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; *Labor Force Development; Majors (Students); *Masters Programs; Program Attitudes; Program Evaluation; Public Colleges; Rural Education; *Student Characteristics

IDENTIFIERS *Human Resources Development Program; *Western Carolina University NC

ABSTRACT

Western Carolina University has offered a master's degree in human resource development (HRD) for the past 5 years. Surveys of 121 current graduate students in 5 fields and the university's 35 HRD graduates sought to develop a profile of the student majoring in HRD and to elicit graduates' opinions of the program. The "typical" HRD student was found to be a white female in her mid-30s, attending classes part-time while working a full-time job. This hypothetical student possessed an undergraduate degree from a large university and had decided to major in HRD to increase her opportunities for employment, advancement, or financial reward. HRD majors differed significantly from business administration, educational administration, public administration, and counseling majors with respect to sex, race, important mentors, and size of undergraduate institution. Most graduates: (1) held positions in which at least half of their time was engaged in HRD activities; (2) were satisfied with their decisions to major in HRD and with their current jobs; and (3) claimed their HRD degree helped them to get a job or promotion. Respondents cited major strengths and weaknesses of the program and rated the "helpfulness" of 10 HRD courses. This report includes recommendations to other rural colleges considering an HRD program. (SV)

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HRD Degrees Now Available in Cullowhee

by

James J. Kirk

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HRD Degrees Now Available In Cullowhee

Non-urban colleges and universities searching for ways to update their curricula and bolster sagging enrollments may want to consider offering a degree in human resource development (HRD). The nation's need for a smarter and more productive workforce is expected to greatly increase the demand for qualified training professionals (Kimmerling, 1989). A recent report issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics placed human resource development among the fastest growing enterprises in the United States (Monthly Labor Review, 1987). National magazines such as U.S. News and World Report (1989) and Working Woman (Russell, 1989) have identified human resources as being one the growth occupations of the 1990's.

Individuals interested in becoming human resource developers are being advised to earn formal college degrees (Gutteridge, 1986). However, there are currently only about 300 HRD academic programs in the entire country (ASTD, 1988). Approximately 143 programs are at the Masters level and are housed in schools of education (Geber, 1987). Sixty-five are at the undergraduate degree level, 55 are advanced certificate programs, and 58 are at the Ph.D. level (Pace, 1986).

Since it is larger organizations with at least 500 employees who mainly hire full-time trainers, HRD degree programs are primarily located on urban and suburban campuses.

Nevertheless, the experience of Western Carolina University may give some academic planners in rural areas reason to believe that HRD degree programs can make it on their campuses as well. Located in a poor rural county of less than 27,000 people, Western launched its MS. in HRD five years ago. Today there are 60 active HRD students. Forty-seven percent (28 students) attend evening classes at its main campus in Cullowhee, NC. Cullowhee, with a population of less than 2,000 is an unincorporated rural farming community located in the Appalachian Mountains. Fifty-three percent (32 students) attend classes at Western's Graduate Center in Asheville, NC. Asheville is a popular tourist community fifty miles from Cullowhee and has a population of approximately 53,000 people.

Students seeking a HRD degree from Western complete 36 semester hours of course work, including an internship. Required courses consist of Introduction to HRD, Instructional Design, Methods of Research, Foundations of Adult Education, and Seminar in HRD. Classes are offered in the evenings. The majority of students take 3 to 6 semesters hours per term and graduate in 3 years.

Five Year Review Study

After five years of operation, a review of Western's fledgling HRD program was undertaken. One of the primary

objectives of the study was to more clearly define who majored in HRD and to determine how these individuals differed from students majoring in similar academic disciplines available at the university. A 193 item questionnaire was distributed to 154 students attending graduate classes in Human Resource Development (HRD), Business Administration (BA), Education Administration (EA), Public Administration (PA), and Counseling (COUN). One hundred twenty-one students (79%) returned completed questionnaires via stamped, pre-addressed envelopes.

The survey instrument contained eleven likert-type questions requiring students to rate the degree selected variables influenced their choice of graduate major. Twenty-two short answer questions inquired into students' personal/occupational backgrounds. The Vocational Preference Inventory (VPI) made up the remaining 160 items (Holland, 1985). The VPI requires respondents to express their interest or lack of interest for 160 occupations. Responses on the VPI were used to determine students' Holland vocational codes and to assess their preferences for "high status" and "traditionally male" occupations.

Prior to analyzing students' responses, three preliminary data handling steps were undertaken. First, Holland codes were assigned students' undergraduate and graduate college majors as well as their current occupations. Secondly, students' scores on the various VPI scales (Social, Enterprising, Artistic,

Realistic, Investigative, Conventional, Status, Masculinity) were computed. Finally, occupational congruence scores between each student's VPI/undergraduate major, VPI/graduate major, VPI/current occupation, undergraduate major/current occupation, and graduate major/current occupation were calculated. Much of the preliminary data handling was accomplished with the aid of Dr. James Morrow, an independent expert on the Holland occupational classification system.

In order to test the statistical significance of observed differences in the data, 4 statistical operations were performed. They included:

1. Generating descriptive statistics on the eleven variables believed to influence selection of graduate major.
2. Subjecting students' responses on the eleven variables to a principal components factor analysis.
3. Generating descriptive statistics on 33 separate personal/occupational variables (sex, race, age, mentors, vocational preferences, current occupations etc.).
4. Conducting analysis of variance and chi square tests to determine the statistical significance of observed differences between HRD students and students majoring in EA, MA, PA, and Coun.

Results of the Principal Component Factor Analysis are shown in Table 1. Three factors are discernible: factor I = opportunity, factor II = career change, and factor III =

quality. Alpha coefficients for the 3 subscales are .825, .37, and .79 respectively. Due to its low reliability, factor II, career change, was not used in any subsequent analyses. The highest loadings for the "opportunity" factor are in items 1-3; employment opportunities, financial rewards available, and possibilities for advancement. Items 7-9 contain the highest "quality" loadings. They include high quality of instruction, high quality of advisement, and ability to make high grades.

Profile of Western's HRD Student

The results of step three, generating descriptive statistics (mean scores) for 33 separate personal occupational variables were used to construct a profile of the "typical" HRD student at Western (see Table 2 and Table 3). She was found to be a white female in her mid thirties. Considering only one alternative field of study, she took an average of three months to settle on HRD as her major. Although she reported herself having at least two friends working in the training field, it was her spouse and close relatives who had the greatest influence on her choice of major. She possessed an undergraduate degree from a large university where she reports having maintained a 3.2 grade point average. While in graduate school she attended classes part-time and worked a full-time job.

Several factors appeared to have affected her decision to major in HRD. Of prime importance was a desired increase in employment opportunities. She saw the HRD degree as a means of increasing her chances for advancement and financial reward. While her full-time job included some training and development responsibilities, it mainly involved non-training duties more closely associated with her undergraduate field of study. Her strongest vocational preferences were for "social," "enterprising," and "artistic" jobs (see Table 3). Of the four other student groups, she appeared most similar to PA majors.

Different Folks, Different Majors

The final analysis of students' responses, step four above, involved running analysis of variance and chi-square tests. The aim was to determine if observed differences between HRD majors and the four other student groups were statistically significant at the .05 level (see Table 2 and Table 3). HRD majors were found to statistically differ from BA, EA, PA, and COUN majors with respect to sex, race, important mentors, and size of undergraduate college attended. The significantly higher percentage of women pursuing HRD degrees probably reflects the types of organizations in the region who hire individuals with HRD related backgrounds ie. local colleges and community social/health agencies. Such

social service organizations typically employ high percentages of female workers. The strong female student interest in the HRD degree may also be due to the field's projected job growth and its less rigid career paths.

While minority students constituted only ten percent of the HRD majors, their representation was significantly greater than that for BA, EA, and PA majors. The small percentage of minorities in all five fields represents an ongoing challenge for WCU. In spite of Western's rigorous efforts to recruit minorities, few of these students are interested in attending a university located in a sparsely populated rural county with few minority residents. Those minority students who do come to WCU are frequently from foreign nations - China, Thailand, and Jamaica. HRD degrees are currently unavailable in these countries.

Unlike students in the four other disciplines, HRD majors did not cite friends and teachers as being among the individuals having the greatest influence on their choice of graduate major. Instead, they identified their spouses and close relatives. This is probably due to the high percentage of females found among HRD majors. Their spouses and close family members remain the most significant persons in their lives. It is to them they turn for support and career advice.

Another unique characteristic of HRD majors was the extremely low number of individuals (5%) who did their

undergraduate work at small universities. Could it be that most instructors and students at these schools are unaware of the many career opportunities becoming available in the HRD field? If so, students from such colleges can hardly be expected to include HRD among their graduate education plans. Is it not also plausible that faculty at many small colleges are aware of the burgeoning field of HRD but are inclined to advise students to enter more traditional careers?

How Graduates View The Program

A second objective of the five year follow up study was to ascertain how graduates viewed the new HRD program. A 12 item questionnaire was mailed to all 35 individuals who had graduated in the past three years. Twenty-seven graduates (77%) returned completed questionnaires. Items on the survey instrument inquired into graduates' career moves, perceived value of selected courses, as well as their general opinions regarding the quality of the HRD program. Respondents were asked to identify what they considered to be the program's major strengths and weaknesses, and to offer suggestions for improving the program.

Mean scores for items 1 through 8 of the Graduate Survey appear in Table 4. Mean helpfulness ratings for the 10 most frequently taken HRD courses appear in Table 5. Eighty-five

percent of the respondents expressed satisfaction with their decision to major in HRD, the same percentage reporting themselves to be generally satisfied with their present jobs. Those not satisfied with their selection of major tended to be working in non-HRD jobs with which they were unhappy. A little more than half of the graduates (56%) currently held positions in which they spend 50% or more of their time engaged in HRD activities (skills training specialist, vocational evaluator, admissions advisor, housing coordinator, job placement counselor). Approximately 78% claimed their HRD degree either helped them get an entry level HRD job, get a "better" job, or secure some kind of promotion. One third of the respondents felt overqualified for their current jobs.

A content analysis of what graduates identified as major strengths and weaknesses of the program revealed four major strengths. Flexibility, was listed by 16 of the 27 graduates (59%) as being among the program's greatest strengths. Students liked being able to select almost one half of their courses and having a variety of specializations from which to choose. Nine of the 27 graduates (33%) identified the personal interest professors take in students as being among the program's principal strengths. Small class sizes and the availability of evening courses off campus were cited by 22% of the graduates as major strengths.

Compared to strengths, items considered to be major

weaknesses were fewer in number and more varied. Fifty-six percent listed the infrequency at which certain core courses were offered as a weakness. They reported having difficulties getting into selected required classes. One third of the respondents said that some professors placed too much emphasis on theory. They recommended giving greater attention to the practical side of conducting needs assessments, developing media materials, designing computer based instructional packages, business writing, and managing HRD budgets.

Mean "helpfulness" ratings for the ten courses most frequently taken by HRD majors appear in Table 5. Graduates reported Consultation, Organizational Communications, Career Development, HRD Internship, and Introduction To HRD as being among their five most helpful courses. Students claimed that the Consultation and Organizational Communications courses helped them better function in their organizations. They said the Career Development course helped them make key career decisions.

Conclusions

HRD seems to play well in at least one small American town. The number of HRD majors at Western is projected to grow by 30% over the next year. The results of its five year follow-up study suggest that WCU's HRD program provides a

valuable service to students. Eighty-five percent of the graduates are generally pleased with their choice of major. Seventy-eight percent say the HRD degree has helped them advance in their careers. All of the program's required courses, and many of its guided electives, are rated as being "very helpful."

Results of the follow-up study also highlight two areas in which programmatic improvements are needed. A majority of HRD graduates' complaints were related to the unavailability of certain required courses. The apparent causes of the problem are twofold: (a) while the number of HRD students has increased substantially, additional sections of core courses have not been made available and (b) there are now more students in the program who want to take at least two courses a semester, whereas the program was originally designed to accommodate adult students wanting to take only one course per semester. Additional sections of selected core courses are clearly needed.

Some HRD graduates also thought that certain professors were overly theoretical. It is not uncommon for graduate level classes to contain substantial amounts of theory. It is also not uncommon for individuals to hold differing opinions regarding the proper balance between theory and practice. Perhaps this particular situation can be improved by helping instructors better understand the emphasis "adult" learners

place on being able to directly apply what they learn. Maybe professors can be encouraged to present more concrete examples of how HRD practitioners can apply key theoretical concepts.

Recommendations

Academic planners on non-urban campuses must do their homework before jumping on the HRD degree bandwagon. WCU is not a microcosm representative of all small towns in the United States. It is merely one example of a successful HRD degree program in a non-urban setting. Decisions such as whether or not to offer a HRD degree and the form such a degree should take must be based on the economic, demographic, and institutional conditions at a given location. For example, Western North Carolina has a growing economy, excellent road system, and numerous social service organizations. WCU has an active foreign student recruitment program, a critical mass of professors committed to making the HRD program a success, and no competing HRD degree programs in all of Western North Carolina.

Rural colleges who do decide to offer graduate degrees in HRD should make every effort to make their programs flexible and practical. The skills, knowledge, and specific career goals of adults seeking graduate degrees in HRD vary greatly. No one set curriculum can hope to adequately address the

learning needs of such a diverse mix of students. HRD students need considerable leeway to choose those courses which best close their particular learning gaps. Like most other adult learners, they want what they learn in class to be directly applicable to their everyday work situations.

A highly flexible HRD program requires students be given a variety of courses and specializations from which to choose. Since colleges and departments at many rural universities can offer only a limited number of courses, a flexible HRD program means a program which spans across various schools and departments. While close cooperation among these diverse and semiautonomous units may not come easy, it has its rewards. Professors from the various disciplines talk more to each other and learn more from one another. The same holds true for students. For example, greater in-class contact between BA and HRD majors at WCU has helped HRD students learn the importance of paying close attention to the financial aspects of training. It has helped BA majors learn the importance of paying greater attention to the human side of management.

Having a flexible HRD program does not mean a program void of structure. The program needs to be developmental as well as flexible. The curriculum's scope and sequence should proceed from the more general and basic to the more specific and sophisticated. Many HRD graduate students have been out of school for years. They have either forgotten, or never had the

formal opportunity, to learn the fundamental concepts upon which the practice of HRD is based. Most lack sufficient knowledge about the HRD field to intelligently set specific career goals. For these, as well as a variety of other reasons, HRD students at WCU are first required to take a core of foundation courses (see Table 5). Once most of these courses are completed, students are free to take "guided electives," courses that are fairly general but more directly related to various HRD roles. Finally, students are encouraged to put together a group of elective courses which constitute a viable specialization under the HRD rubric.

Summary

An increasing demand for professionally trained human resource developers may cause some non-urban universities to consider offering HRD degrees at their institutions. Western's highly successful graduate HRD program shows that such programs can make it outside large metropolitan areas. But before jumping on the HRD degree bandwagon, academic planners are advised to carefully examine the economic, demographic, and institutional conditions which exist at their particular locations. Furthermore, it is recommended that HRD programs be made flexible, developmental, practical, and interdepartmental.

Table 1: Factor Analysis of
Reasons For Selecting Graduate Major

Item	Content	Heaviest Loadings for Each Factor		
		I	II	III
1.	Employment opportunities	.857		
2.	Financial rewards available	.83		
3.	Possibilities for advancement	.878		
4.	Opportunities for engaging in more fulfilling work		.737	
5.	Desire to change careers		.873	
6.	Desire to move to a different geographical area			
7.	High quality of instruction			.853
8.	High quality of advisement			.884
9.	Ability to make high grades			.709
10.	Less demanding program requirements			
11.	Encouragement from employer			

Table 2: Personal/Occupational Differences
Between HRD & Selected Graduate Students

Variable	HRD	MBA	Ed. Admin.	Coun.	PA
Age	36	32	38	37	35
% Females	90	*47	*58	75	*42
% Minorities	10	*3	*3	6	*0
% Working in Major Field	85	60	72	67	63
# Other Majors Considered	1.25	*.517	*.778	.875	1.789
# Months to Decide	3.4	3.65	5.17	*11.53	2.88
Opportunity Influencers	11.45	*12.655	11.529	*8.214	11.111
Significant Mentors	Relative Spouse	Friend Teacher	Friend Teacher	Teacher Friend	Friend Teacher

* Statistically Different From HRD at .05 level

N = 121

Table 3: Vocational Preferences Among HRD
& Selected Graduate Students

Variable	HRD	MBA	Ed. Admin.	Coun.	PA
Enterprising	5.4	5.267	5.194	3.75	5.474
Social	6.55	*2.733	6.694	*9.375	5.474
Artistic	4.3	3.867	4.5	*7.625	5.789
Conventional	1.65	*3.533	*3.361	2.563	2.211
Realistic	2.245	2.8	3.667	3.813	3.474
Investigative	2.95	3.567	*5.861	4.563	4.632
Status	7.45	9.033	*9.806	7.688	10
Male/Female	1.2	*2.4	*2.528	1.625	2.158

* Statistically Different From HRD at .05 level

N = 121

Table 4: Survey of HRD Graduates

Variable	# Graduates	% Graduates
Working in HRD while attending school	12	44.44
Presently working in position where at least 50% of the time is spent on HRD activities	15	55.55
HRD degree instrumental in getting an entry HRD position	11	40.74
HRD degree instrumental in gaining a promotion or "better" training & development job	10	37.04
Feel over-qualified in current job	9	33.33
Generally satisfied with choice of HRD major	23	85.18
Generally satisfied with current job	23	85.18
Generally satisfied with the quality of instruction	18	66.66

N = 27

Table 5: Graduates' Perceived Helpfulness of Selected Courses

Course	Number of Students Enrolled	Mean Rating	SD
Consulting	9	4.555	.53
Organization Communications	9	4.444	1.02
*Career Development	27	4.296	.99
Internship in HRD	15	4.13	.92
*Introduction To HRD	27	3.592	1.31
Organizational Behavior	14	3.571	1.45
*Research Methods	27	3.481	1.28
*Seminar in HRD	27	3.444	1.22
Personnel Administration	18	3.222	1.11
*Adult Education	27	3.074	1.3

* Core HRD Courses (Required for graduation)

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